

# The Good Side of Conflict

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*"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)*

When I was in my early twenties, there was nothing I disliked more than conflict. I won't use the tired cliché that *I avoided it like the plague*. But, since I just used it anyhow, I'll admit I tried to navigate around conflict at any cost.

I was a 'stuff it and smile' kind of girl. The problem with pretending to be fine when you're really not, is all that pent up steam will eventually come out. And if you've ever held your hand too close to steam, you know how it can burn.

A much healthier approach to the inevitable conflicts we all must deal with is to face the issue head on with grace and humility having asked ourselves one very crucial question. This question is so crucial that might I dare say not asking it could lead to extreme *conflict escalation* rather than *relationship restoration*.

**So, what's this crucial question?**

**Am I trying to *prove* or *improve*? That's the question. In other words, is my desire in this conflict to prove that I am right or to improve the relationship at hand?**

When I try to **prove** I am right, *I use the circumstances of the conflict as an arsenal to attack the other person*. I come armed with past hurts and offenses ready to state my case. I'm tempted to tear down the other person. I react from a place of hurt and anger and can often say things I later regret.

On the other hand, when my desire is to **improve** the relationship, *I seek to understand where the other person is coming from and I care enough about the relationship to fight for it rather than against it*. Instead of reacting out of anger, I pause and let the Holy Spirit interrupt my first impulses. I tackle the issues, not the person.

Here are some great questions to ask when we're dealing with conflict out of a desire to improve a relationship:

- Can you *help me understand* why you feel this way?
- Why don't we both agree to *stick to the issue at hand* and not pull in past issues?
- *What is your desired outcome* in this situation?
- How can we meet in the middle on this issue?

My husband I have renamed what we used to call "fights." We now call them "growth opportunities." And the more we've been practicing these principles, the less conflicts we've been having.

But I won't tie this devotion up in a neat bow and end all "cheerio." While Art and I are doing great right now and have had very few "growth opportunities" lately, conflicts with others seem to always be around the corner. So please hear my heart, I'm not saying all of this is easy. Just this week I've had to tackle some growth opportunities that made me feel like I had fire crackers burning through my veins.

Maybe you can relate.

**What I will say is that it's possible to let those conflicts lead us to better places in our relationships. Improved places. And that is the good side of conflict.**

Dear Lord, help me to realize that with each conflict I face I can make the choice to improve the relationship rather than try and prove I'm right. This is hard, Lord, really hard. But, I want to grow in this area and I know this is a good place to start. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Application Steps:**

*Take time to pause* before jumping into any conflict resolution. Sometimes a simple pause is all that's needed to **remember to attack the problem at hand and not the person. Keep in mind it's more important to improve the relationship than prove we are right.**

**Reflections:**

How might it help your next conflict resolution attempt to use these questions?

- Can you help me understand why you feel this way?
- Why don't we both agree to stick to the issue at hand and not pull in past issues?
- What is your desired outcome in this situation?
- How can we meet in the middle on this issue?

**Power Verses:**

Ephesians 4:29, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (NIV)

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